

James Madison to Edward Coles, September 3, 1819. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

TO EDWARD COLES.¹ CHIC. HIST. SOC. MSS.

¹ Coles was Madison's secretary from 1810 to 1816 and in 1819 went to Edwardsville, Ill., where he freed all his slaves, giving to each man 160 acres of land. He was governor of Illinois from 1823 to 1826. See *Sketch of Edward Coles, Second Governor of Illinois*, by Elihu B. Washburne, Chicago, 1882.

Montpellier, Sept. 3, 1819.

I have received, my dear Sir, your agreeable letter of July 20 wch. was very long on the way.

We congratulate you much on the various successes of your western career. The first thing that strikes is the rapidity of your promotions. Bounding over the preliminary sailorship, the first step on the deck of your Bark, pardon me, of the nobler structure, your Ark, makes you a Pilot. The name of Pilot is scarcely pronounced, before you are a Captain. And in less than a twinkling of an eye, the Captain starts up a Commodore. On the land, a scene opens upon us in which you equally figure. We see you at once a ploughman, a rail splitter, a fence builder, a cornplanter, a Haymaker, and soon to be a wheat sower. To all these rural felicities, which leave but a single defect on your title of *Husband* -man, you add the polished pleasures of a Town, you mean a City, life. And to cap the whole, you enjoy the official dignity of Register of the land office in the important

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Territory of Illinois. We repeat our congratulations on all these honors & employments, and wish that the emoluments may fully equal them.

You are well off, for this year at least, in being where

you can expect bread from corn planted in July. Here famine threatens us, in the midst of fields planted in April. So severe a drought is not remembered. We have had no rain, scarcely, throughout the months of June, July & Aug't, and the earth previously but little charged with moisture. On some farms, among them my two small ones near me, there has been no rain at all, or none to produce a sensible effect. In some instances there will not be the tythe of a crop, and the drought has been very general not only in this, but in other States. It has been, I understand particularly severe throughout the Tobacco Districts in Virg'a and must make this crop very scanty. It is at this critical moment feeling in all its force, the want of rain. I fear that Albemarle has no better than neighbour's fare. Fortunately for us the wheat crop was everywhere very fine, and well harvested.

The season has been as remarkable too for the degree & constancy of its heat, as for its dryness. The Thermometer in the coolest part of my largest room was on two days, at 92°, for several at 90 & 91, and generally from 84 to 5–6–7–8. Our springs & wells have not yet entirely failed; but without copious rains this must quickly be the case.

You are pursuing, I observe, the true course with your negroes, in order to make their freedom a fair experiment for their happiness. With the habits of the slave, and without the instruction, the property, or the employments of a freeman, the manumitted blacks, instead of deriving advantage from the partial benevolence of their Masters, furnish arguments against the general efforts in their behalf. I wish your philanthropy could compleat its object, by changing their colour as well as their legal condition. Without this, they seem destined to a privation of that moral rank & those social participations which give to freedom more than half its value.

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Mrs. Madison as well as myself, is much gratified by your promise to devote the next winter to your native haunts. We hope your arrangements will give us an ample share of your time. We will then take the case of your Bachelorship, into serious & full consideration. Mrs. M. is well disposed to give all her aid, in getting that old thorn out of your side, and putting a young rib in its place. She very justly remarks, however, that with your own exertions, hers will not be wanted & without them not deserved.

Accept our joint & affectionate wishes for your health & every other happiness.

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